



EXHIBIT 15
DATE 2/8/07
HB 406

2800 Tenth Avenue North
P.O. Box 37000
Billings, Montana 59107-7000

February 7, 2007

Honorable Members of the
House Appropriations Committee

Mister Chairman and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kristianne Wilson. I live in Shepherd, Montana, work as an executive at Billings Clinic, and offer this testimony in support of HB 406—the Montana Community Health Center support bill.

I have served in the past on numerous state health policy advisory councils and recently completed co-chairing with Joan Miles, Director of the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the State Planning Continuation Grant. I also chaired the Coverage Options Task Force during the initial State Planning Grant in 2004-2005. These public/private collaborative efforts have yielded several policy recommendations of which the last legislative session enacted to reduce the number of uninsured and increase access to affordable health care insurance coverage in our state.

We know that all Montanans will not be able to afford to purchase health insurance privately, work for an employer that offers health insurance as a benefit, or qualify for a public program. Both of the State Planning Grant deliberations struggled with this reality and focused their attention on how to strengthen the safety net.

Community health centers offer a viable option for many to access affordable, quality preventive and primary health care. In calendar year 2005, one in twelve Montanans received care at a community health center. These private, not-for-profit consumer-directed health care entities play an increasingly important role in both urban and rural Montana communities in offering access to medical, dental and mental health services. Community centers enjoy a strong interdependent relationship with the local hospital and medical community.

In my own health care community, Billings, the Community Health Center—Deering Clinic—has been an integral part of broader health care collaborations to design and sustain medication assistance services, crisis stabilization services for the co-occurring mental health and substance abuse population, and medical education programs.

I urge you to support funding to develop more federally funded community health centers and expand services and delivery sites through existing Montana community health centers.

I offer this testimony as a private citizen, committed to improving access to affordable health care for all Montanans.

Sincerely,

Kristianne B. Wilson
Vice President
Strategic Development